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May 15, 1998

The Honorable Herbert H. Bateman
Chairman
The Honorable Solomon Ortiz
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Military Readiness
Committee on National Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Paul McHale
House of Representatives

Subject: National Guard: Reported Readiness of Combat Brigades During the Persian Gulf War

This letter responds to Rep. McHale's request for information concerning the Army National Guard's 48th Infantry Brigade. Specifically, he requested information on whether the reported readiness status of the 48th at the time it was activated for the Persian Gulf War accurately portrayed the unit's true readiness. We addressed this issue in prior reports issued in September 1991 and November 1992. This letter summarizes the information in these reports pertaining to Rep. McHale's request.

The 48th brigade was one of three Army National Guard "roundout" brigades activated for the war.¹ The 48th was the roundout brigade for the 24th Infantry Division, which had been deployed to the Gulf. After the 48th was mobilized in late 1990, it trained at its mobilization station and at the Army's National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California. The 48th was validated by the Army as being ready for deployment, but it was not deployed and remained in training status. The Army selected an active Army brigade, the 197th Infantry Brigade, to deploy in place of the 48th.

¹Some active Army combat divisions were organized with fewer brigades than the number called for by the Army's divisional structure and were "rounded out," or filled, by reserve brigades.

In September 1991, we reported on the training and preparedness of the three roundout brigades, including the 48th, that were activated for the Persian Gulf War.² At the time of the brigades' mobilization, one brigade was reporting a C-2 level of training readiness, meaning that its commander estimated the unit needed 28 days to become fully trained.³ The other two brigades were reporting a C-3 status, with the commanders estimating that the units needed 40 training days to become fully trained. Two weeks after mobilization, the commander of the brigade reporting C-2 revised his assessment to C-3, while the commanders reporting C-3 revised their assessments to C-2 and C-5.

On the basis of our work, we concluded that the postmobilization training plans developed by the three roundout brigades were based on unreliable readiness ratings. Specifically, Second Army and III Corps officials were skeptical of the accuracy of the brigades' reported readiness ratings, even after these ratings were revised following mobilization. Key officials involved in the training of the three brigades believed that the readiness reports fell far short of capturing the true status of the brigades' combat proficiency. As a result, the Second Army and III Corps conducted independent proficiency assessments that drew heavily on the results of the brigades' prior visits to the NTC. The 48th, for example, had rotated to NTC in July 1990.

On the basis of their assessments of existing training plans and of the brigades' proficiency, the Second Army and III Corps substantially revised the training plans, calling for 91 to 135 days of training—over three times the number of days that the original readiness reports stated were needed. For the 48th brigade, the Second Army developed a 91-day training plan that consisted of battle staff training, instruction in basic soldiering skills, and crew-level training. The plan also included a rotation to the NTC.

In November 1992, we reported on two active Army brigades, including the 197th, that deployed in place of the Guard roundout brigades.⁴ Our review

²National Guard: Peacetime Training Did Not Adequately Prepare Combat Brigades for Gulf War (GAO/NSIAD-91-263, Sept. 24, 1991).

³The ratings represent a commander's estimate of the number of days a unit needs to be fully trained in all mission-essential tasks. The ratings range from C-1 to C-5, with C-1 being most ready. A C-5 rating indicates that a unit is not able to execute its wartime mission because it is undergoing a change of equipment. Specific unit readiness ratings are classified.

⁴Army Training: Replacement Brigades Were More Proficient Than Guard Roundout Brigades (GAO/NSIAD-93-4, Nov. 4, 1992).

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Showed that the replacement active Army brigades demonstrated a higher level of proficiency at the time of their deployment to the Persian Gulf for almost every objective measure of individual and unit proficiency than the roundout brigades. Although the proficiency of the roundout brigades improved during postmobilization training, their overall proficiency did not reach a level comparable to that of the replacement brigades.

Officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and the National Guard Bureau provided oral comments on this letter and disagreed with its findings. Reserve Affairs officials stated that while the facts in this letter are essentially correct, it misrepresents the full scope of the problem. National Guard Bureau officials stated that the letter does not provide a complete and accurate picture of the overall brigade readiness issue. We note that the purpose of this letter is to summarize the results of our prior work and it does not provide the same level of detail as our two reports. We modified our letter to emphasize this point. We also note that the Department of Defense, in commenting on our September 1991 and November 1992 reports, agreed with our findings. These same findings are reflected in this letter and are explained in more detail in the two reports.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Secretary of Defense and to interested congressional committees. We will also make copies available to any other interested parties.

If you or your staff have any further questions concerning this issue, please contact William C. Meredith, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-4275.



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